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An appeal to the tradesmen of  
Great Britain on cheap food  
and brisk trade

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# AN APPEAL

TO THE

## TRADESMEN OF GREAT BRITAIN

### CHEAP FOOD AND BRISK TRADE;

IN ANSWER TO

### 'AN APPEAL TO THE TRADESMEN OF THE METROPOLIS.'

FELLOW ELECTORS,—The present state of the Corn question has placed us in a position of some importance in the eyes of both political parties, and it is not at all wonderful that “appeals”\* are addressed to us on a subject, which, after all, we have perhaps better means of understanding than those who pretend to be our instructors. Yes, fellow electors, we have ample means within our reach of fully appreciating this question as it bears upon trade and industry; but unless we take the trouble to examine the facts for ourselves, we shall be liable to be led aside from the path of truth, and to be made the sport of any specious and plausible writer whose inclination or interest may prompt him to undertake the task. Let us not, therefore, surrender our judgments to any pretender, who may not have half the practical means of information that we enjoy. Self-reliance is our best policy; common sense is the ingredient which will enable us to detect what is deleterious in the “appeals” that are so liberally offered to us; and I earnestly invite you to travel with me over a field of inquiry, which certainly, in point of interest to the trading classes, is without parallel. Mind, I am not asking you to embrace any preconceived opinion of mine, but simply to examine with me a parcel of everyday facts, in order that we may make up our minds respecting the effect of cheap food upon the interests of tradesmen.

\* “An Appeal to the Tradesmen of the Metropolis, by one of the Corn Dealers,” a pamphlet in favour of the corn monopoly, first published in the *Times* newspaper, and distributed to the public.



As men interested in the prosperity of trade then, and not as mere consumers of bread, I invite you to examine and judge for yourselves. As a mere consumer, I, for one, care but little for the saving of a few pounds a year in bread. Many of you, no doubt, think with me on that point. We are not sorry to save a little money certainly, but if that saving were to be put into competition with brisk trade and increased comfort among the working classes, I am quite sure you would join me in saying,—let us pay the tax without a murmur. But does dear bread produce a brisk state of trade? This is precisely the question we have to inquire about.

Up to this point the “London Tradesman” does not materially differ with us. He says,—“To all of us, whether tradesmen or journeymen, the main thing is not to be able to buy food cheap, but to secure plenty of trade, plenty of work, good profits, good wages, so as to secure the means of buying what we want, whether cheap or dear.”

In another place, he says,—“One single dull season would do me more injury in six months than the lowering of the price of bread would do me good in twenty years; so clear is it that the price of bread is a trifling matter when compared with the far more important question of a good or bad state of trade.”

Now, stripping all this of the inference which the “London Tradesman” would have us draw from it, we need not differ with him respecting propositions which are only put hypothetically; but with all the affectation of wisdom which these propositions display, they do not go one single step towards determining the question as to the manner in which cheap food affects trade; and before we have done with our inquiry, who knows but that it may turn out, that the only way to have “plenty of trade and plenty of work”—the only mode of securing “good profits and good wages,” is, “to be able to buy food cheap.” In other words, that *cheap food is the only guarantee for commercial prosperity.*

#### THE SAVING CALCULATED.

And here, by the way, we may remark, that the “London Tradesman’s” statement of his own case helps us

towards a solution of the whole question :—" If the Corn Laws were repealed," says he, "and bread were thus reduced 2d. or 3d. a loaf, I should probably save in my household expenditure some 6*l.* or 8*l.* a year." Just so; every family in the kingdom would save some 6*l.* or 8*l.* a year; and as there are now four millions of families in Great Britain, the saving, according to the "London Tradesman's" calculation, would be 24,000,000*l.* to 32,000,000*l.* We will, however, take the saving at only 5*l.* per family, which will make it 20,000,000*l.* on wheaten bread alone. But wheat does not constitute above one fourth of the grain consumed in this country. On barley, malt, rye, oats, beans, and peas, there will be some saving. It is not pretended that the saving *per quarter* will be equal to the saving on wheat, but as all the other species of grain exceed forty millions of quarters, it is not extravagant to assume that a total money saving will be effected equal to that on wheat; in other words, that what the "London Tradesman" considers the paltry little saving to each family in the United Kingdom amounts to forty millions of money.

This may seem a large sum, but if any one will take the trouble to make the calculation, he will find that it is within the truth. Indeed, if we take some of the statements of average consumption that have been made use of by the advocates of monopoly and continued restriction, we shall find our calculation moderate in the extreme. Let it, however, be reduced to the lowest amount at which it has ever been stated, and it will be still found to amount in the aggregate to a very considerable sum.

Now what becomes of this large sum? Why, unless the London tradesman will assure us that he believes it is thrown into the river, he is bound to admit that it is expended in some way or other with the shopkeeper, and so contributes to the extension of trade.

The savings of each family will be differently expended, according to their circumstances and tastes. The industrious classes will indulge in better food, and in a more abundant supply; they will also clothe their wives and children better every year,—as well, in fact, as they can now only afford to do on the occurrence of a very cheap year. Other classes will also extend their purchases of clothing and household goods, and of comforts and luxuries. The "London Tradesman"



is, therefore, as we all know, quite ignorant of the nature of trade when in reference to the pecuniary saving of 6*l.* or 8*l.* a year, he says, "This would be the *whole gain* that would accrue to me by the change." If he had said the whole *private saving*, he would not have been incorrect, but saving and gain are two different things; the tradesman's "gain" consists of the profit on the increased trade which arises out of every other man's saving in the kingdom. My saving is a few pounds a year,—my gain is the profit on that share of the forty millions of increased trade which may fall to my lot.

And here let it be remarked, that a saving of forty millions, and an increased demand for that amount of commodities, creates a trade to an infinitely greater extent—indeed, to many times the amount. This will appear when we consider the manner in which trade is subdivided in every well-organized mercantile community. The very smallest number of persons employed in the transfer of articles from the producer to the customer is *there*; and in some cases, where, for instance, articles undergo several preparations before they are fit for the customer, the number of hands through which they pass is almost incalculable; and, mind! *at every step they leave a profit.*

#### EXTENSION OF TRADE CALCULATED.

Let us begin with the case of groceries, sugar, coffee, tea, and so forth. There is no doubt that, even without any reduction in the duties on these productions, an increased demand will result from the few pounds saved to every one of the four million families in Great Britain. If the duties on these several articles be reduced, there will be a still further saving, and consequently a still further extension of trade. But, I repeat, without such saving there must be a great increase of demand, in consequence of cheap food alone. How is this demand supplied? First, the West and East India merchants import. Secondly, the wholesale grocer makes larger wholesale purchases. And thirdly, the retail grocer gives larger orders to the wholesale grocer. Nay, in practice, we, who are familiar with the way in which business is done in all large towns, know full well, that generally a fourth and a fifth class of persons have an extension of business in consequence of an



increase of trade, namely—the broker who performs the business of buying and selling between the importing merchant and the wholesale grocer, and the commercial traveller, who performs a similar office between the wholesale grocer and the shopkeeper. Now I repeat, that in passing through all these hands the article leaves a profit; and if we are to reckon the extension of trade to shipowners, dock companies, inland carriers, packers, insurers, and many others, this little tract would scarcely be large enough even to make the enumeration. All these profits summed up together the consumer has to pay, and he pays them willingly, and even cheerfully, because a moment's reflection tells him that a service is performed for every profit rendered; which profit, moreover, he is quite sure competition keeps from being exorbitant. Indeed, if the business were not thus divided, the service could not be so well nor so cheaply performed: The West India merchant, for example, would make a poor business of retailing sugar and coffee; whilst the retail grocer who should attempt to import for himself, would find the process so expensive, that his rival over the way would undersell him in every article.

Turn we now to the case of manufacturers. Here, also, we have three classes through which all manufactured articles pass in their way to the customer—the manufacturer, the warehouseman, and the shopkeeper. If the shopkeeper dealt with the manufacturer, he would have to run over half the kingdom for his assortment; the consequence would be, that it would not be so tasteful, and would cost him more. Thus, as in the case of groceries, although the consumer has to pay three profits at least, yet, on the whole, he gets what he requires cheaper and better than under any other arrangement. True it is that in so enormous a city as London, some few shopkeepers go at once to the manufacturer—their dealings are so large that it is worth their while—they are, in fact, both warehousemen and shopkeepers. It may also happen that some few manufacturers are warehousemen also, and there may even be cases in which the manufacturer may set up a warehouse, and have a retail shop into the bargain; but in such a case there are three distinct capitals, three distinct establishments, each having its distinct superintendent, and three distinct functions performed. But as I am addressing practical men

to whom all this is familiar—though the “London Tradesman” seems to be ignorant of it—I need not longer dwell upon it; I will merely state the inevitable conclusion, that the saving of forty millions causes an extension of wholesale and retail trade to at least three times that amount, or one hundred and twenty millions, besides extending the business of shipowners, inland carriers, warehousemen, wharfingers, insurance companies, packers, dock and canal companies, and giving increased employment to the industrious classes employed by them. Indeed it is impossible for human ingenuity to trace the effects of saving through all its intricate ramifications. To contemplate the widely extended circle of trade embraced by the saving of only a single penny on the loaf, actually dazzles the understanding; and it is only when, as practical men, we confine ourselves to the few stages between the producer and the customer that our views become clear and distinct, and that we are enabled to laugh to scorn such shallow fallacies as that of the “London Tradesman,” who, utterly ignorant, as I said before, of the very nature of trade would fain persuade us that the paltry saving of a few pounds makes our only gain.

The “London Tradesman” speaks of the Corn question as if it were merely a transfer of trade from one class to another, without any saving. The change amounts to a cheaper mode of production, and the national gain is the difference between the old and the new mode. If the English landlord gained the forty millions that the nation loses by dear food, there would be no loss of custom in the aggregate; but in point of fact the landlord’s gain is only a small portion of the loss incurred by all other classes; a portion which, when the landlord’s indirect profit which will arise from cheap food, and all its consequences, are considered, becomes utterly insignificant. Now, all except this insignificant portion is utterly and irretrievably lost in consequence of the forced and expensive cultivation of poor soils, not adapted to the growth of wheat. All the extra labour expended on poor soils, in consequence of the Corn-laws, is as much wasted as it would be if employed in carrying a heap of stones from one place to another.

If the question merely related to a transfer of a part of the trade from the home-grower to the continental



grower, without any saving of price, and consequently without any advantage in other ways, the "London Tradesman" would be right. His fallacies would be truths, and we should be mad to desire a change. But let us never forget that the transfer of a part of the trade cannot take place without a reduction of the price of every loaf of bread we consume, of every glass of ale we drink, and of every feed of corn we give our horses; in short, of every article derived from the soil; the difference, that is the saving, as we all know, going to extend trade in the manner pointed out.

#### INCREASE OF THE HOME MARKETS.

The "London Tradesman" is very anxious to impress upon us the necessity of looking at the home market; but he certainly does not know so well as we do what "the home market" means, and on what it depends. On the authority of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he tells that, with an 8s. duty, "*four* millions of quarters (of wheat) would be annually imported;" that the cost of this at home being 12,000,000*l.*, "our home trade is at once reduced by that amount." Is it not clear our Tradesman knows nothing of our home trade? The quantity of wheat and other grain imported will, no doubt, create a foreign trade to the full extent of its value. Most of the countries we shall take grain from already take manufactures from us, and are only eager to extend their purchases, if we afford them the means; but even if some send corn and take only money, we, who are familiar with the operations of trade and exchanges, know that we must buy that money elsewhere with our goods. Nations, moreover, which are not our customers, are, at all events, the customers of our customers, so that there can be no extension of trade anywhere in which a great commercial nation like this does not share.

With all this, however, it is not for the sake of eight or ten millions of foreign trade that we need care for a free trade in corn. The important consideration to those who are interested in trade is, the "few pounds saved to each family"—the 40,000,000*l.* saved to the nation at large,—and, above all, the 120,000,000*l.* of home trade created thereby. Are we not right in saying that the "London Tradesman" is ignorant of the common operations of trade?

## THE TRADESMEN'S FIRST CUSTOMERS.

Hitherto our investigations have applied to the trade of the whole country, but there is one statement in the "London Tradesman's" letter which shows a most lamentable ignorance of the trade of the metropolis. He tells us that a great part of the London trade consists in selling to the "landed aristocracy." Do the "landed aristocracy" visit the shops of the eastern part of the metropolis? Do they carry their custom to Bermondsey, Southwark, or Lambeth marsh? Are they seen in Finsbury, or even in Marylebone and Westminster, except in a few favoured shops, situated in a few favoured streets? and even in those favoured spots, the greater number of the shops are shops of general custom. The statement *may be true* of some half a dozen shops, but I very much doubt whether even a single shop could be found which does not require more general custom than that of the landed aristocracy exclusively; and depend upon it, no shop of very large trade is supported by the class in question; such shops require a much more extensive body of customers. Let any man think over a number of streets, one by one, and ask himself the question:—Do the landed aristocracy bring their custom here? and he will soon find the small proportion to which an affirmative answer applies. Having thus got into the few streets of aristocratic custom, let him apply the same question from shop to shop, and he will soon be convinced of the absurdity of the London Tradesman's proposition. No, no; the tradesmen of the metropolis depend more upon each other's custom than they do upon that of the landed aristocracy. They depend also on the custom of the middle and industrious classes generally; the former rivalling in wealth the lords of the soil, and the latter making up in numbers what they are deficient in individual consumption. Indeed, the "six or eight pounds saved to each family," of which the London Tradesman speaks so contemptuously, and therefore so ignorantly, is all we need care for. The foreign trade is a matter of secondary consideration; what we require is, the vast, the almost incalculable extension of home trade which must inevitably spring from cheap corn. AN ELECTOR.

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